

**Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan
Regional Constituent Workshop #7
Gulf of Mexico Region – Orange Beach, Alabama
July 6, 2004**



The seventh in the series of Regional Constituent Workshops supporting the development of the new National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan for 2005-2009 was held at the Orange Beach Community Center in Orange Beach, Alabama on July 6th for constituents in the Gulf of Mexico Region. The regional workshops were designed to provide Recreational Fisheries constituents the opportunity to share their vision of an effective and successful Federal Recreational Fisheries Program, describe the characteristics and attributes of this Program, and discuss them in the context of a review of the draft NOAA Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan.

Bobbie Walker, Chairman of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, welcomed the attendees. Opening remarks were also provided by Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator. Following introductory comments by the workshop team, the attendees participated in a facilitated session designed to elicit ideas from each individual, share these ideas and prioritize them through small group interaction, and then jointly develop an affinity diagram representing a collection of the key attributes and characteristics of the group. The following diagram represents the product of this exercise. The results from the exercise revealed the need for better data collection, a balance between commercial and recreational fisheries, and a desire to more closely regulate and strengthen the enforcement of commercial fisheries. After a plenary review, the current draft of the Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan was introduced and the attendees were given the opportunity to comment on the contrasts and similarities between their group product and the draft Strategic Plan.

In previous communications the Gulf Coast Conservation Association (GCCA) and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission have both indicated that good data are key to improving management of both commercial and recreational fisheries. This same idea was repeated by the recreational anglers attending this workshop. The attendees felt that the government could facilitate greater access to more data by using more technology in data management, such as more accurate locations using the Global Positioning System (GPS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) displays such as those provided on websites for commercial boaters. GIS data and satellite imagery showing currents and sea surface temperature, when superimposed on fish catches (long line and release data), provide valuable information on fish catch patterns (e.g., Hilton Offshore, and www.Roffs.com). It was believed that this type of information would be easy for the government to obtain and would allow a better overall picture of the Gulf of Mexico fisheries. The constituents encouraged the use of the Internet to support recreational fisheries surveys and emphasized the collection of cost and earnings information as a necessary component of data collection. The constituents emphasized appropriate enforcement of long line (commercial) fleets in addition to recreational fishermen, particularly to collect data.

With regard to communications with constituents, the attendees sought more regular, periodic meetings. There was general agreement that not enough are held and that better opportunities existed during off-season times of the year. A recommendation was made to approach fishing clubs, organizations, and tournaments to interact, collect information, and publicize constituent meetings. A centralized notification process through a local organization was offered as better process, as well as local postings of these meetings.

Results of Affinity Diagramming Process: Characteristics and Attributes of the Future Federal Recreational Fisheries Program

Artificial Reefs / More Habitats	Regulate & Strengthen Enforcement of Commercial Fisheries	Enforcement Funding	Promoting Catch & Release	Better Data Collection	Balance Commercial & Recreational Fisheries (Include Year-Round Seasons)	Better & Simpler Regulations	Recreational Fish Management & Accountability	(Other)
Tax Incentive for Artificial Reef Development (Individuals NOT Only Organizations)	Keep Commercial Boats Out of Public Reef Area	More Enforcement	Tag & Release (Reward Tourneys that Tag & Release)	Develop Sound Data Collection Activities With Compatability & Comparability Among Regions	Fair & Equitable Split by the Number of Boats That Reef Fish in Gulf Of Mexico Recreational & Commercial	Consistant Regulations on Seasons, Limits, Etc. that Do Not Change from Month to Month	Better Explanation of Formulas Used to Formulate Fisheries Management	Acquire Increased Funding for Stock Status to Generate Realistic Stock Assessments
Encourage Creation of Fish Habitat (i.e. Artificial Reefs)	Stop Commercial Fishery in Permitted Zone	Must Have Enforcement Off Shore! Not Harrassing, But Enforcement	Promote Catch & Release Internationally	Fish Management; Based on Accurate Reliable Science, Not on Large Degree of Uncertainties	4-6 Fish Limit; No Release on Red Snapper	Provide the Decision Makers with Valid Data to Evaluate the Rec Plan Based on "What's Best for the Fishery" Not "What's Best for a Particular User Group"	Better Communication Regarding Regulation & Explaining the Need for Management Decisions	Meetings that are Accessible to the Recreational Fishermen (i.e. Not During Peak Season)
	Keep Commercial Boats Out of Public Reefs That Put Out "No" - "O" Reefs	Keep Oil Rigs Accessible to Recreational Fishing	Reduce Release Mortality	Improve or Replace Angler Survey	Be Able to Fish Sat & Sun for Red Snapper After Regular Season & Let Weather Partake in Trips	Coordinate Efforts Between Local, State (AL, FL), & Federal Gov'ts in Regulations & Data Collection	Better Research, Monitoring and Management of Impacts of Coastal Development on Fisheries Resources (Non-Point Pollution Control)	Maintain Desoto Canyon Closure
	Protect Access to Fisheries Resources for ALL User Groups (i.e. No MPA's)	Make Commercial Boats Report Leaving & Entering Pass to State Authority by Phone or VHF for Tracking Purposes on Market Catches	Promote Stewardship of Fisheries Resource	Get Data from ALL Users: Charter, Commercial & Other Recreational (Private Boat & Pier)	Reduce Size Limit in Season (Snapper) 12"-14" (4 per person) Ass 1 Fish per Person Off Season	Develop Accurate Socio-economic Impact Studies that Consider ALL Stakeholders		Try to Keep Good Stock of Mature Fish to Keep the Species Productive
	Hold Commercial to Fair Standards (Season & Limits)	More Enforcement Resources (Rec & Comm)		Apply a Large % of \$ Available to Gathering Credible & Accurate Science	Avoid Season Closures			Allow More Satellite Tags for Interested Persons
	Buy Out Commercial Permits for Reef Fishing			Have Better Data! Have Real People Collecting Information! Not Guess Work!	Evaluate Need for Size Limits in Regard to Release Mortality			
	Stop Longlining if it Kills 99% of Billfish			Stat. Validity: Proper Sample Size; Internet Surveys for Recreational Anglers; Concern Observer Program; Data Shared	Let Recreational Fishing Start at Same Time as Commercial; 1st 10 Days of Each Month in Addition to Regular Season			
	Try to Keep Commercial Fishermen in Check to Leave Enough for Sports Fishermen			Re-evaluate Effectiveness of Current Data Collection Programs w/in NMFS for Relevence & Redundency	Sustainable Stocks with Year Round Seasons			
	Keep Commercial Boats Out of Artificial Reef Zones			Include Inches & Pounds in All Technical Documents as Well as Metic System	Stop Gill Netting in Alabama			

Simplification of regulations was discussed, accompanying the collective view that too many complicated regulations exist. The attendees envisioned one "playbook" for an angler, unique to each state, to obtain all needed information rather than rely on finding licensing information from regional, state, and Federal sources. It was recognized that Highly Migratory Species (HMS) regulations would add a complication to this approach. It was also noted that the average fisherman wants laws and rules that are simple, and that the government should provide guidance to ensure that all fishermen are informed and understand laws, regulations, and formulas.

The attendees believed that commercial fishermen should have better incentives towards optimizing fisheries management, and that there is no equitable split between recreational and commercial fish allowances. With regard to the Spanish Mackerel fishery, commercial fishermen can catch all the fish at once at the artificial reef areas before the recreational fishermen can catch their quota over a longer time frame. A need was perceived for equal opportunity to fish the reef areas by limiting "bandit" rigs and other commercial gear.

One item that received repeated mention was that fact that no coordination or consideration is given to recreational fishermen for tropical storm and hurricane impacts to loss of time to fish. The recreational anglers felt that their available fishing time and the end of the fishing season should not be impacted by something that they had no control over, such as the weather. A suggestion was made to either extend the season, either by adding days or allowing fishing on weekends.